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Winter Tips for Elders

(Tips for Staying Warm and Safe)

The Executive Office of Elder Affairs has prepared this guide as an aid for seniors and their caregivers to have a healthy and safe winter.

Stay Warm This Winter

How Cold Is It? The first line of protection is to be aware of weather forecasts and prepare for days when you are unable to go shopping, keep medical appointments or get to personal and social appointments. Besides the temperature, pay attention to the Wind Chill Index which is based on the rate of heat loss from exposed skin by combined effects of wind and cold.

What Do I Wear To Stay Warm? When it's very cold, dress in multiple, dry layers of loose-fitting clothing, pairs of thick socks, as well as a scarf, hat and mittens.

How Do I Keep My Home Warm? Heating your home is expensive, but important to staying healthy in the winter. Attic insulation is very helpful along with sealing air leaks. Be very careful of space heaters, which can pose a burn and fire risk. If you are having trouble paying your home heating bill, contact:

- **LIHEAP Fuel Assistance Program:** Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) provides payments to energy providers to defer some of the costs of monthly heating bills for those eligible. Call (800) 632-8175 or visit LIHEAP for more information.
- **Salvation Army Good Neighbor Fund:** To apply or learn about eligibility, call (800) 262-1320, (617) 542-5420 or visit www.magoodneighbor.org.
- **Oil Co-ops:** These buying groups are formed to help consumers purchase energy at lower costs. A list of oil co-ops in the state is available at www.mass.gov/doer or you may contact DOER at (800) 351-0077.
- **Shop Around:** The Massachusetts Oil Heat Association offers a statewide list of member home heating oil dealers at www.massoilheat.org.

- **Gas/Electricity Discount Rates:** If you cannot afford to pay your gas or electric heating bill, your utility may not terminate your service if:
 - All residents in your household are at least 65 years old;
 - You have a financial hardship AND either:
 - 1) you, or someone in your home, is seriously ill; or
 - 2) you have an infant in the home under 12 months; or
 - 3) it is between November 15th and March 15th and you need the service to heat your home.

If you have a financial hardship, contact your utility directly to apply for protection.

Who Can I Call If I Have Questions And Concerns Regarding Utility Issues?

If you have questions or concerns regarding your utility or have received a notice of termination and need assistance, you should contact:

- **Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities:**
 - Consumer Division: 617-305-3531; 1-800-392-6066; 1-800-323-3298 (TTY)
- **Massachusetts Office of Attorney General:**
 - Elder Hotline Toll Free 1-888-243-5337
 - Consumer Complaint & Information Services Hotline 617-727-8400
 - Utilities Division Hotline Toll Free: 1-888-514-6277

Stay Safe In The Snow And Ice

Avoid overexertion. Shoveling is very strenuous exercise and can quickly take a toll on your body. Ask someone to shovel for you if you are at high risk of a heart attack or other injury. If you must shovel, go slowly, lift carefully, take frequent breaks, drink a lot of water, dress warmly and stop at the first sign of pain or exhaustion. Keep a (covered) bucket of sand on your porch to use for “black ice.”

Stay indoors when the weather is very bad; if you need to leave your home, try to use public transportation. If you must drive, make sure you are well stocked with:

- A full tank of gas;
- An emergency winter storm kit (flashlight, flares, candle, first-aid kit, tow line or rope, paper towels, spare shovel);
- Sand or kitty litter for traction;
- A windshield scraper and de-icer;
- Cell phone and/or an emergency radio; and,
- Blanket, gloves, socks, hat and boots.

Stock Up For Snowy Days

In the event of major storm, elders should be prepared to remain inside their homes for a few days. These precautions will help you weather emergencies:

- Emergency phone numbers and contact information (doctor, family, friends, neighbors, police, fire, board of health, your local Council on Aging);
- Extra medications: prescription and over the counter;
- First-Aid Supplies (bandages, tape, gauze, anti-bacterial ointment, alcohol, cold pack);
- A three day supply of non-perishable foods and drinks (1 gallon of water per person per day and extra for pets, ready-to-eat canned meat, fruit, vegetables, snack bars, cereal, juice, powdered milk);
- Battery operated flash lights, radio, manual can opener, candles, matches/lighter, cash;
- Hand sanitizer, paper products and garbage bags; and,
- Clean, warm clothes and footwear and blankets and sleeping bags.

Stay Healthy During Flu Season

It is not too late to get vaccinated. February is when the flu season is at its height. Contact your health care provider about getting a flu shot and a pneumococcal (pneumonia) shot. For additional information on the flu, pneumonia, and where to obtain shots visit the Department of Public Health's website: www.mass.gov/dph/flu or call the DPH information line at 866-627-7968.

Ask Yourself: Who Is Looking Out For Me?

- In bad weather, tell a friend, family member, or neighbor where they will be able to find you. Ask them to call you regularly to check on your well-being. Tell them where an extra key is located so that they can get into your home in the event of an emergency.
- If you have special health needs such as oxygen, contact your police station and let them know you may need assistance if the power fails.

For additional information, visit the websites listed in this release. To locate a Council on Aging in you neighborhood call: 1-800-AGE-INFO (1-800-243-4636) or visit the website: www.800ageinfo.com.